

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM



ECPAT International is a global network of civil society organisations working together to end the sexual exploitation of children (SEC). ECPAT comprises member organisations in over 100 countries who generate knowledge, raise awareness, and advocate to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation.

Key manifestations of SEC include the exploitation of children in prostitution, the sale and trafficking of children for sexual purposes, online child sexual exploitation (OCSE), the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (SECTT) and some forms of child, early and forced marriages (CEFM). None of these contexts or manifestations are isolated, and any discussion of one must be a discussion of SEC altogether.

Notably, these contexts and manifestations of SEC are becoming increasingly complex and interlinked as a result of drivers like greater mobility of people, evolving digital technology and rapidly expanding access to communications. Now more than ever, the lines between different manifestations of SEC are blurred and children may be victimised in multiple ways.

The ECPAT Summary Papers explore each of these five manifestations but should be considered a set addressing this complex problem. This Summary Paper focuses attention on SECTT.

Over the last decades, the world population has become increasingly mobile, with travel and tourism becoming a part of more people's lives than ever. Until the global COVID-19 pandemic the number of international travellers had continued to grow, and was expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030.¹ Similarly, domestic travel has become more frequent and increasingly accessible to many. Unfortunately, at the same time, the sexual exploitation of children in the

¹ UN World Tourism Organisation. (2011, October 11). [International tourists to hit 1.8 billion in 2030](#). In 2018 there were 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals, a number reached two years ahead of UNWTO forecast. This positive trend has, however, been abruptly interrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak. In an initial impact assessment, UNWTO estimated a decrease by 20% to 30% in international tourist arrivals in 2020 later reviewed to declines of 58% to 78% for the year, depending on the speed of the containment and the duration of travel restrictions and shutdown of borders. See UNWTO. (2020, May). [Impact assessment of the COVID-19 outbreak on international tourism](#).

context of travel and tourism (SECTT) has continued to thrive globally, with child sex offenders using the infrastructure of the industry, increasingly combined with online technologies, to commit their crimes.

There is no doubt that the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 had a massive impact on the travel and tourism industry.² Post-pandemic tourism restarted with domestic travel, and will increasingly use technology along with new travel and tourism products. It is crucial to capitalise on the progress to fight sexual exploitation of children that has been made in recent years by adequately addressing SECTT during the recovery of the travel and tourism industry.

Tackling SECTT has always been at the heart of ECPAT International's mandate. It has been thirty years since the first steps against sexual exploitation of children (SEC) were taken – notably as part of the first campaign to protect Asian children from travelling child sex offenders that officially launched the work of ECPAT International. This Summary Paper outlines key trends and priority areas of work that ECPAT International considers to be integral in fighting SECTT and addressing children's vulnerability today.

Advances in Internet and mobile technology have contributed heavily to SECTT, which is now more than ever intertwined with online forms of sexual exploitation.³ Likewise, adaptations in the way people travel and the spread of various travel products such as 'voluntourism',⁴ orphange

tourism or mega-events have put children at new risks of exploitation.⁵ Factors such as poverty, social exclusion and weak legal frameworks exacerbate imbalances of power and children's vulnerability to sexual exploitation in travel and tourism.

SECTT had previously been referred to as 'child sex tourism'; however, this terminology fails to name the criminal nature of child sexual exploitation, and instead implies that these crimes are some form of 'tourism'.

SECTT is not another form of tourism but is a crime – and should be named as such. Offenders who abuse and exploit children are not 'sex tourists' – they are criminals.⁶

The [Global Study on the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism](#) (herewithin the 'Global Study') was launched in 2016 by over 60 partners. The report brought substantial light to the topic through the first comprehensive gathering of global evidence to understand the global nature and scope of SECTT.⁷ The [Global Study](#) defined SECTT as: *"Acts of sexual exploitation of children, which are embedded within the context of travel, tourism or both."*

2 The World Travel and Tourism Council. (2020, June). [WTTC estimates over 197 million jobs losses in the Travel & Tourism sector](#).

3 Grocki, S. (2016). [Sexual exploitation of children in tourism and online](#).

4 Volunteer tourism, (or voluntourism) describes a field of tourism, in which travellers visit a destination and take part in projects in the local community. For more information, please refer to ECPAT International. (2019, June). [Thematic Paper: Sexual exploitation of children and voluntourism](#).

5 As agreed upon by the participants in the first International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism that took place in Bogotá, Colombia, on 6-7 June 2018. See The International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism (2020). [Declaration and Call for Action for the Protection of Children in Travel and Tourism](#).

6 For further information on this topic, please refer to ECPAT International (n.d.). [Sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism and terminology](#).

7 The study includes input from 67 partners around the world, as well as contributions from experts and children themselves.

The [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (herewithin the 'Luxembourg Guidelines') recommended the term SECTT to refer to these crimes. The term has the further advantage of broadly capturing both the concept of tourism⁸ and other situations linked to the notion of travel⁹ (e.g. business travel, travelling workers, and longer-term transit or residence outside one's home region/ country) which allows for anonymity and potentially gives rise to child sexual exploitation.¹⁰ The relevance of this term has been widely recognised, as testified by its use in the [UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics](#) adopted in 2019 and in the '[Out of the Shadows](#)' Index launched by the Economist Intelligence Unit.

The following section outlines the latest developments and key challenges in the fight against SECTT. Following that are four priority areas for work in this context. The priorities build primarily upon the findings of the [Global Study](#), and also reflect the international commitments made at the first International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism that took place in Bogotá, Colombia, on 6-7 June 2018.

THE INDEPENDENT EXPERTS GROUP ON CHILD PROTECTION IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

The development of the Global Study was guided by the High-Level Task Force on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism. Its later mandate was the elimination of SECTT through the implementation of the Global Study recommendations and the Call for Action from the first International Summit on Child Protection. The task force built strong alliances and mobilised a wide range of stakeholders. Having significantly progressed the agenda on child protection in travel and tourism, in 2019 it evolved its structure to an Independent Experts Group on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism (IEG), that continues to serve as an advisory group.¹¹

8 Tourism is intended as "the commercial organisation and operation of holidays and visits to places of interest".

9 Travel is intended as "movement from one place to another for any purpose".

10 Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children (2016). [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#). 55-56.

11 See [here](#) the list of IEG members.

KEY CHALLENGES AND TRENDS

SECTT is a complex, secretive and hidden crime that evolves with changing circumstances over time. The stereotypical view of SECTT was that it was a phenomenon affecting developing countries and was mostly perpetrated by white, middle-aged men. The [Global Study](#) broadened understanding of this crime and identified a number of trends requiring further research.¹²

Though international travelling offenders continue to be amongst those committing sexual exploitation in this context, SECTT is now better understood to also very much be a domestic and intra-regional crime. It affects all countries of the world – both developing and developed economies. While individuals engaging in SECTT may be ‘preferential’ offenders actively seeking to abuse children, others are also ‘situational’ offenders who may not set out to sexually exploit a child, yet through opportunity or circumstances, they do.¹³ Additionally, offenders may also include facilitators who arrange and enable sexual exploitation of children, though they may not commit it themselves. Some offenders are women, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the age of perpetrators varies.¹⁴ Offenders are found amongst business travellers, teachers, volunteers, aid workers, people attending large-scale sporting and cultural events, military personnel, expatriates, domestic and international travellers and tourists.¹⁵

Some offenders may be part of networks that actively promote and organise SECTT, alongside a broad range of intermediaries and facilitators (e.g. pimps, traffickers, criminal networks, or even staff working in the private sector, such as taxi drivers,

hotel staff, modelling agents, tourist guides, street vendors, etc.).¹⁶

Children falling victim to SECTT come from a range of backgrounds, but what they all have in common is their vulnerability. Poverty and financial hardships are some of the known push factors to SEC, including SECTT.¹⁷ However, there are a wide range of groups who may be less well known to be at risk, but who can be victimised in this context: boys as well as girls, children from minority and indigenous groups, migrant children, working children, refugee and displaced children, very young children, children with disabilities, LGBT young people as well as children from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, including very wealthy families.¹⁸

The worldwide growth of the travel and tourism industry has resulted in new modalities of sexual exploitation of children. In the past, tourism had been more regulated, for example, with governments implementing stricter measures such as registration for hotels, travel agencies, and tour operators – measures known to help prevent SECTT. However, recent years have seen the increasing emergence of more informal tourism services like home-stays, longer-term rentals, smaller hotels and so-called ‘party hostels’ (often run remotely). The misuse of traditional travel and tourism infrastructure for SEC continues to be documented, but offenders have also moved to less-regulated domains such as the above-mentioned, thus making their crimes harder to detect.¹⁹ Forms of completely unregulated tourism such as ‘slum tourism’, eco-tourism, community tourism that

12 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands (2016). [Offenders on the Move](#). 115-117.

13 *Ibid.*, 15.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, 53-55.

16 *Ibid.*, 55-56.

17 *Ibid.*, 15.; ECPAT International. (2016, March). [Power, impunity and anonymity](#).

18 *Ibid.*, 49-50.

19 *Ibid.*, 60.

gives access to local groups including indigenous people, or sharing-economy practices such as home- or car-sharing via tech platforms, have raised new risks. Though solid research in these contexts is still needed, anecdotal evidence supports this assumption, such as reports of suspected cases of sexual exploitation at Airbnb rentals in USA and Canada.²⁰

Developing trends around international volunteering have also increased children's vulnerability to SECTT.²¹ Volunteering has become a popular activity for people travelling to developing countries as a way for tourists to 'give back' whilst seeing the world. Some forms of such 'voluntourism', despite the best of intentions, can have a range of harmful consequences, including increasing the risks to children of sexual exploitation.²² Research and media reports about this in countries such as Haiti,²³ Nepal²⁴ and Uganda²⁵ have documented the damaging effects that can occur.²⁶ Children may be actively recruited into orphanages, often with the complicity of owners or staff of child institutions,²⁷ to meet the demand from tourists and donors for voluntourism experiences – this practice is referred to as 'orphanage trafficking'.²⁸

The [Global Study](#) exposed the impact that travel for work may have on the escalation of SECTT, especially in areas with high concentrations of labourers temporarily living far from their homes (e.g. business hubs, construction sites, ports, etc.).²⁹ This finding has been corroborated by further research such as a 2018 UNICEF study revealing that SEC is rife in the mining and extractive industry zones of three Bolivian cities, with several identified perpetrators being migrant workers.³⁰

Additionally, large-scale sports or cultural events cause a large influx of travellers to specific destinations and there is some evidence that this may pose risks to children and youth. An investigation undertaken by the University of Dundee, for example, documented an increase in cases of child sexual exploitation particularly around stadiums during the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil.³¹ Understanding to what real extent risks translate into harm in such settings is, however, difficult and remains an area for further exploration.³²

As mentioned before, the proliferation of SECTT has been exacerbated by cheap and accessible travel as well as expanding access to information and communication technologies. The rise of mobile devices such as smartphones and the existence of the 'darknet' allow anonymous global connections and make it easier for travelling sex offenders to communicate and share information. They communicate about places where they can find vulnerable children to target; ways of accessing them; and share child sexual abuse materials they produce if they do so. Children themselves may not be aware that engaging in certain activities online may result in an increased risk of SEC. Facilitators connect with potential offenders using the Internet. Social media platforms are also misused by perpetrators to identify and groom vulnerable children prior to travelling to meet them in their own countries, or abroad. For example, a 2018 report identified that some tourists had travelled to Greece during the European migrant crisis specifically to sexually exploit young migrant boys they had connected with via the Internet.³³ Moreover, perpetrators might choose countries well-known for SECTT to exploit children through

20 Oliver D. (2020, 20 February). [Exclusive: Airbnb expands pledge to fight human trafficking amid hospitality industry struggles](#). *USA Today*.

21 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands. (2016). [Offenders on the Move](#). 36, 40, 44, 58, 59, 61-62.

22 ECPAT International. (2019, June). [Thematic Paper: Sexual exploitation of children and voluntourism](#).

23 Mulheir G. & Cavanagh M. (2016). [Orphanage Entrepreneurs: The Trafficking of Haiti's Invisible Children](#).

24 ECPAT International (2020). [ECPAT Country Overview: Nepal](#). 12-13.

25 UYDEL, ECPAT France and ECPAT International. (2019). [ECPAT Country Overview: Uganda](#). 15-16.

26 ECPAT International. (n.d.). [Voluntourism and child trafficking into orphanages](#).

27 Protecting Children in Tourism/ECPAT International. (2019, June). [2019 Trafficking in Persons Report addresses the role of governments to end the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism](#).

28 Lyneham S. & Facchini L. (2019, March). [Benevolent harm: Orphanages, voluntourism and child sexual exploitation in South-East Asia](#). Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice, *Australian Institute of Criminology Series*, Canberra, Australia, n. 574. See also Van Doore K. (2016). [Paper orphans: Exploring child trafficking for the purpose of orphanages](#). *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 24: 378-407.

29 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands. (2016). [Offenders on the Move](#). 64.

30 UNICEF Bolivia. (2018). [Explotación sexual comercial de niñas, niños y adolescentes y sus rutas en zonas mineras y extractivas en territorios de los departamentos de La Paz, Oruro y Potosí](#).

31 Florence A., Meier M., Packer, I. (2016). [Child sexual exploitation: What do mega sporting events have to do with it?](#)

32 *Ibid.*

33 Brun, D. (2018). [Men and boys in displacement Assistance and protection challenges for unaccompanied boys and men in refugee contexts](#). 11.

live streaming³⁴ taking advantage of an environment where they think it might be easier to target children.

Underpinning all these trends are the usual broad range of risk factors to child sexual exploitation that include economic crisis and unemployment, conflict, migration, gender inequality, prevailing social norms around masculinity and sexuality, and weak child protection systems.³⁵

IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As the world responded to COVID-19 push factors that facilitate or lead to sexual exploitation of children are expected to have intensified. Over 197 million travel and tourism jobs were at risk of being impacted due to the pandemic, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council. This dramatically increased the economic vulnerability of families, in particular in countries which depend on income from tourism. With people financially struggling due to the crisis, the circumstances may allow offenders to gain trust and access their victims more easily than ever before, both online or through physical domestic and foreign travel.

As noted in this section, offenders who sexually exploit children during travel are both domestic and international and are not only tourists. Most importantly, they are making increasing use of fast-developing technologies to commit their crimes. Under COVID-19 related travel restrictions, it is anticipated that some offenders who are grooming children online, may travel to meet when restrictions ease, or may continue to exploit through technological means. Additionally, while opportunities for foreign travel are limited, some offenders may be encouraged to offend domestically.

ECPAT International calls on governments and the private sector to carefully consider child protection as a key element as sustainable and responsible travel and tourism is developed for the recovering industry.

On World Tourism Day 2020, ECPAT International and the Down to Zero Alliance launched the Call for Restarting Travel & Tourism with Child Protection in Focus.³⁶

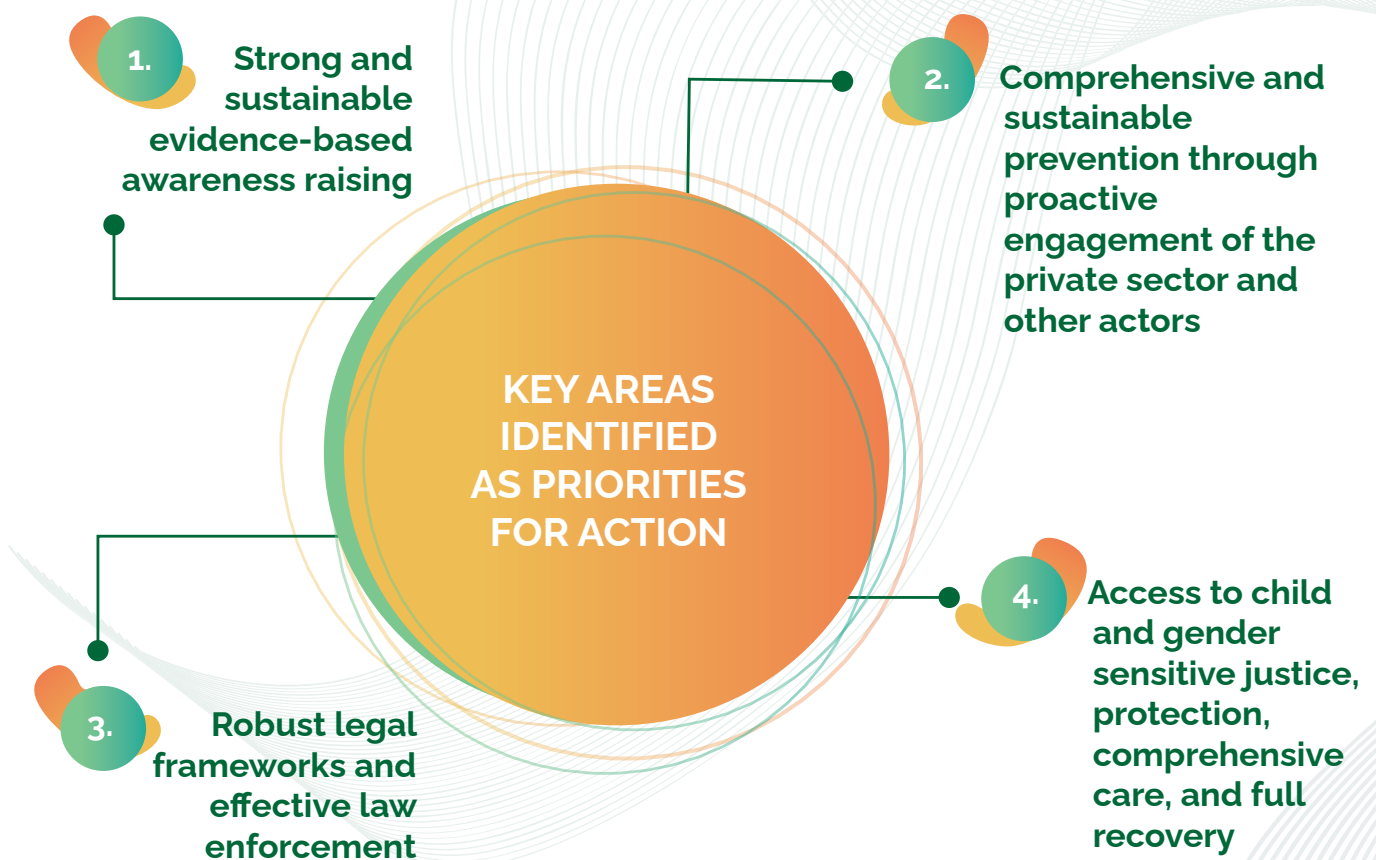
34 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands. (2016). *Offenders on the Move*. 62-63.

35 *Ibid.*, 49-52.

36 *The Call for Restarting Travel & Tourism with Child Protection in Focus* (September, 2020).

ECPAT International's approach to ending SECTT is based on advancing a comprehensive, child rights centred, gender-sensitive and multi-stakeholder framework where all actors actively

work together to protect children and to end impunity of sex offenders.³⁷ Four key areas have been identified as priorities for action:



The following sections outline the justification for each priority area and provide examples of good practice in the field. Besides supporting the implementation of the recommendations from the [Global Study](#), translating these commitments into actions is a crucial contribution to moving the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development forward, particularly the SDG targets related to ending all forms of violence against children (5.2, 5.3, 8.7, 16.2) and those calling for the development of sustainable tourism (8.9, 12b).

³⁷ The above framework was agreed upon during the first International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism, read more in the [Declaration and the Call for Action](#).

STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE EVIDENCE-BASED AWARENESS RAISING

We know that increased awareness-raising of governments, the general public, the private sector and other key actors including communities, families and children, leads to a deeper understanding of SECTT, and ultimately to a greater mobilisation against this crime. When backed by robust evidence and multi-sector partnership, these efforts will reduce demand and result in policy and behaviour change that increase reporting and child victims' access to support.

Whilst the topic of SECTT has progressively become a focus of discussion in international, regional and national fora, enforcement of commitments and public engagement on the issue remains a continuous challenge. Stigmatisation and perceptions of child sexual exploitation deter victims from seeking help, or bystanders from taking action.³⁸ When cases do come to light, these factors can have the double impact of negatively affecting children who have been victimised, as well as reducing the likelihood of prosecution of offenders.³⁹ Moreover, as noted by the 2019 US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons report, some governments do not acknowledge the crime or are reluctant to implement large-scale awareness campaigns due to the negative impact they believe it would have on the tourism industry.⁴⁰ Ironically, this inaction both does not protect children and can still lead to tourism destinations and industries being negatively impacted by this crime.

In a context where the existence of SECTT is still denied, experience shows that increased awareness-raising at the individual, institutional, and societal levels is an essential strategy for prevention, identification, and response to SECTT.⁴¹

Global, regional and national campaigns are needed to break the silence on discussing SEC, promote awareness about the crime, and to inform the public about how to report and respond. In this context, it is critical to understand the reasons for reluctance of the public to report SECTT, and design responses accordingly. Also, some governments must acknowledge

38 Ketchel, M. (2014, May). [Breaking the Taboo: will we ever really be able to talk about child sexual abuse](#). *The Conversation*.

39 ECPAT International. (2016, March). [Power, Impunity, and Anonymity](#).

40 Protecting Children in Tourism/ECPAT International. (27 June 2019). [2019 Trafficking in Persons Report addresses the role of governments to end the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism](#); US Department of State. (2019, June). [Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

41 Vezina, C. (2016). [Child Sexual Abuse: Raising awareness and empathy is essential to promote new public health responses](#). *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 37(3): 304-314.

that SECTT is not only taking place abroad and being committed only by foreigners and start to address the problem of local demand and domestic SECTT.

Efforts to increase understanding of SECTT should target specific groups and geographical contexts, including 'tourist-sending' communities and destinations hosting travellers and tourists. The travel and tourism industry is ideally placed to sensitise the public about this crime.

Airline companies, for example, have proved to be allies. In collaboration with campaigners, including from ECPAT members, airlines like Air France, Air Canada, Austrian Airlines, Luxair and, more recently, Thai Airways⁴² and Air Mexico⁴³ have developed and shared informational videos during flights.⁴⁴ International airports worldwide – especially in destinations where SECTT has been known to occur – such as Thailand, the Gambia, the Dominican Republic, Peru and Costa Rica – have run campaigns about the existence of the problem, its long-term damaging effects on children and the legal consequences for perpetrators. Another major step came in 2018, when the International Air Transport Association (IATA) approved the [Resolution against Human Trafficking](#) and committing to a number of actions including awareness raising.

Awareness-raising strategies should adapt to the evolving nature of SECTT, addressing emerging challenges and trends.⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, the engagement of informal and less regulated tourism services in sensitisation initiatives has become crucial though it still requires a vigorous push. For example, an effort in this

direction is being made by ECPAT member EQUATIONS in India which has been working with unorganised sectors in travel and tourism with a focus on tour guides, transporters, cybercafés and street vendors, as well as local tourist associations on child protection campaigns.⁴⁶

Campaigns addressing the specific harms for children, resulting from volunteer and orphanage tourism, as well in the context of mega events, have begun to emerge but need to be expanded.

An example worth replicating is the [Smart Volunteering Campaign](#) launched in 2018 by the Australian Government to discourage Australians from engaging in any form of short-term, unskilled volunteering in orphanages. The vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation in the context of mega sporting events has also been given increased awareness through specific campaigns such as [It's a Penalty](#), a UK-based initiative which has been running since 2014 to bring attention to this issue and increase reporting of suspected cases during several sports competitions.

Many awareness-raising initiatives advertise mechanisms for reporting potential incidents of SECTT but increasing information for travellers and tourism professionals, as well as general public and travellers themselves, on the existence of these tools remains crucial.

42 Lih Yi, B. (17 April 2018). [Thailand taps tourists to fight human trafficking and keep the country smiling](#). *Reuters*.

43 Protecting Children in Tourism/ECPAT International. (2018, July). [AeroMexico supports the Blue Heart Campaign against Human Trafficking](#).

44 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands. (2016). [Offenders on the Move](#). 99.

45 ECPAT International. (2016). [Recommendations from the Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism](#). 99.

46 Down to Zero Alliance. (2019). [Effective ways of working with the private sector – background paper and guidance](#). 20.

THE ECPAT 'DON'T LOOK AWAY' CAMPAIGN

The ECPAT 'Don't Look Away' campaign is a key example of an effective reporting platform. This platform, active in 20 countries but with plans to be further expanded, allows individuals who witness suspicious behaviour and/or have information that may lead to the investigation of a potential perpetrator or facilitator of SECTT, to make a report in their own language with confidence that the information will be relayed on to the relevant authorities for action. Comparative research on five low-threshold reporting mechanisms established as part of this campaign identified key quality standards about the way the reports should be handled to improve effectiveness. The research report recommended increasing the visibility of these portals.⁴⁷

Besides raising awareness about the reporting mechanisms (for example, through social media campaigns), there is a need to impart practical and specific skills and knowledge to address reluctance to report suspicious situations and improve public engagement.⁴⁸

Apart from efforts to enhance reporting, awareness raising initiatives are most successful if they are evidence-based, address both demand and supply, include voices of children and empower children and communities to act.

Indeed, research involving over 1,000 participants found that most people were not aware of the existence of the reporting mechanisms, but crucially, that they were also not aware of any signs that may indicate child sexual exploitation.⁴⁹ The study also confirmed the under-reporting of SECTT, identified several barriers and misconceptions (such as lack of trust that the police will act on the report, fear of getting the child into trouble, and fear of misinterpretation of the situation).⁵⁰

47 ECPAT France et al. (2019). [Comparison of European low-threshold reporting mechanisms to gather good practices and needs](#). 28.

48 An example is the campaign launched by ECPAT as part of the World Tourism Day. See ECPAT International. (2018, September). [This World Tourism Day – Report the sexual exploitation of children](#).

49 Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands. (2019). [Reluctance to report sexual exploitation of children related to travel and tourism](#). 4.

50 *Ibid.*, 4-5.

COMPREHENSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE PREVENTION THROUGH PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND OTHER ACTORS

We know that comprehensive, context specific and sustainable prevention is key to ending SECTT. Prevention measures should tackle underlying risk factors, empower children as actors in child rights protection and promote self-regulatory mechanisms for the industry, including codes of conduct.

Public and private stakeholders in travel and tourism have a pivotal role to play in the prevention of SECTT. A strong industry focus on prevention helps to avoid the stigmatisation of the sector and destinations as facilitating or promoting the sexual exploitation of children.

Prevention is the backbone of any strategy to tackle SECTT. While drawing on the resources, expertise and influence of all actors is crucial, preventive efforts can have a greater impact if there is proactive engagement and strong collaboration from the travel and tourism industry, both public and private, backed by responsive law enforcement.

Acknowledging that tourism infrastructure can be misused by perpetrators for the purpose of child sexual exploitation, more and more private sector companies have been adopting policies condemning SECTT and implementing practical child protection measures. These include capacity building of staff and the adoption of codes of conduct outlining standards for child protection.⁵¹

THE CODE

The most recognised example of industry standards specifically focused on combatting SECTT is the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism (The Code). Launched in 1996, this initiative, currently hosted by ECPAT International as part of the SECTT programme, works to end SEC by engaging with companies and travel and tourism industry at large. The Code currently has over 350 members and is implemented in over 160 countries. Since its adoption, over 1.2 million staff have been trained worldwide.⁵² The Code has been included as one of the implementation measures of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination Criteria v2.0, particularly Criteria B5 on "Preventing exploitation and discrimination". The criteria are applicable to the entire travel and tourism industry and serve as the minimum that any tourist destination should aspire to reach.⁵³ Additionally, the Economist Intelligence Unit launched the "Out of the Shadows" Index that assesses countries' responses to SECTT based on the commitment of the industry to The Code.⁵⁴

51 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands. (2016). *Offenders on the Move*. 104.

52 The Code/ECPAT International. (n.d.) [Members of the Code](#).

53 Protecting children in Tourism/ECPAT International. (2020, February). [GSTC Destination Criteria v2.0 now includes child protection performance indicator](#).

54 Protecting children in tourism/ECPAT International. (2019, January). [The Economist Intelligence Unit \(EIU\) launches "Out of the shadows" index](#).

The Code is regarded as a practical preventive tool, however, assessing effectiveness and monitoring the implementation of The Code is still a challenge due to the voluntary nature of self-reporting and evaluation.⁵⁵ A recent example of an attempt to measure progress comes from a research report published in 2019 by ECPAT USA which seeks to assess steps made by the tourism and travel industry in the fight against SECTT. From a comprehensive analysis of all policies and procedures adopted by 70 companies in the USA, the report found that members of The Code scored higher than non-Code members, with the aviation sector scoring the highest. Among the challenges identified, the study emphasised that only one-third of the companies surveyed had provided training to their associates in the last twelve months, and only one in five mandated awareness and response training in their policies for franchised properties.⁵⁶

Sustained and mandatory capacity building of travel and tourism professionals on reporting, preventing and responding to SECTT should, therefore, be prioritised along with the implementation of zero-tolerance policies and child protection standards across the entire tourism value chain.

Efforts are underway to engage sharing economy companies.⁵⁷ ECPAT USA, for example, has collaborated with Uber to develop educational materials about indicators for child sexual exploitation for all their riders, drivers, and Uber Eats delivery-partners in the United States and Canada.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the involvement of popular online platforms and actors from the informal and sharing economy as well as the tech industry should be further expanded in the future. Equally essential will be engaging more small and medium-sized enterprises from the formal tourism sector, which have shown limited progress in implementing child protection policies and practices.⁵⁹

To this end, a new online tool has been developed by the Roundtable Human Rights in Tourism to help small and medium-size tour operators to systematically assess potential and actual human rights-related impacts of their operations in destinations, including the risk for children to be sexually exploited.⁶⁰ In 2019, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), that represents the global private sector of travel and tourism, took a landmark step toward tackling SECTT by establishing a global taskforce to help the industry prevent and combat human trafficking, including of children for sexual purposes.⁶¹

Some initial steps have been taken to prevent and keep pace with SECTT trends, particularly to address voluntourism. The recently designed [Global Standard for Volunteering for Development](#) explicitly discourages volunteering with tourism operators "that have orphanages and other residential care centres incorporated (or with the possibility to incorporate) in tourism programmes or packages".⁶² This recommendation is in line with The Code, which has introduced a specific policy requiring its members to withdraw voluntourism

55 ECPAT International & the Down to Zero Alliance. (2019). [Effective ways of working with the private sector. Background paper and guidance for civil society organisations.](#)

56 ECPAT-USA. (2019). [Stamping Out Exploitation in Travel.](#)

57 See for example, the case of Airbnb which worked with the Polaris Project to create a training curriculum for their safety agents and crisis managers across the world and is now looking for ways to collaborate with ECPAT. Airbnb. (2020, February 20). [Expanding our efforts to combat human trafficking. Airbnb Newsroom.](#)

58 Breeden, T. (2019, 30 July). [Uber Continues the Fight Against Human Trafficking.](#)

59 ECPAT International. (2018). [International Summit in Child Protection in Travel and Tourism.](#) 6, 14, 27.

60 Roundtable Human Rights in Tourism. (2019). [About the tool.](#)

61 Protecting children in travel and tourism and ending impunity for travelling child sex offenders was a key commitment made by world leaders, dozens of travel businesses, NGOs and other organizations, including WTTC – at the first International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism, read more at Protecting Children in Tourism/ECPAT International. (2019, April). [World Travel & Tourism Council takes action against human trafficking.](#)

62 See point 2.C under "Area 2: Safeguarding and Protection".

and orphanage tourism from their products.⁶³ In a similar vein, the [Child Welfare and the Travel Industry: Global Good Practice Guidelines](#), a tool providing guidance to prevent all forms of exploitation and abuse of children, details a number of actions that businesses should take to ensure child protection in voluntourism.⁶⁴

These criteria and standards need to be disseminated and implemented, so that tourism companies can offer alternative rights-based services that do not treat children as ‘tourist attractions’.⁶⁵

The importance of preventing child sexual exploitation and other potential abuses in sports has been increasingly recognised. An example is the [Up to Us Child Safeguarding Toolkit for Member Associations](#) developed by FIFA which, among other things, proposes safe recruitment and screening procedures for all FIFA member associations and gives guidance on planning and organising tournaments, overnight stays and away trips.

The potential negative impact of mega-sporting events on SEC can be more effectively reduced if these guidelines and other international child protection standards are widely applied by all stakeholders and if multi-actor alliances and strategies going beyond individual events are developed.⁶⁶

Preventative efforts against SECTT would never be successful without the involvement of governments. Directing tourism operators to become members of The Code or to adopt and enforce explicit corporate policies as part of national codes of conduct on child protection in travel and tourism is one of the key actions that Ministries of Tourism (or equivalent bodies) can promote.

In Latin America, for example, several countries, members of the Regional Action Group of the Americas (GARA) for the prevention of sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, actively implement national codes of conduct for the protection of children in travel and tourism and The Code, often in partnerships with civil society organisations.⁶⁷ Measures to tackle SECTT should also be included in relevant national action plans.

Several countries are developing these policy documents, however only some of them include specific reference to child protection.⁶⁸

Beyond planning, public stakeholders must show political will by allocating human and financial resources for training and other prevention programmes and initiatives against SECTT.

63 The Code. (2016). [Does your business include voluntourism products or orphanages in tourism programmes?](#). 11.

64 See Guideline 2.4.

65 ECPAT International. (2018). [International Summit in Child Protection in Travel and Tourism](#). 20.

66 *Ibid.*

67 An analysis on national codes of conduct vs. The Code on child protection for travel and tourism industry in the Americas will be published by ECPAT International and GARA in 2020.

68 For the list of the NAPs consult [National Action Plan on Human Rights](#) website.

THE 'SEXUAL EXPLOITATION FUND' IN PANAMA

The government of Panama adopted an innovative approach to the prevention of SEC, including in the context of travel and tourism. The activities of their National Plan on SEC are partly funded through the 'Sexual Exploitation Fund' established by the government. This fund is collected through a tax consisting of charging one Panamanian Balboa (equivalent USD\$1) to every foreign tourist leaving Panama from Tocumen International Airport.⁶⁹ The most recent figures show the Sexual Exploitation Fund collected 668,952.10 Balboas in 2018 via the airport tax and contains a total of 3,429,559.18 Balboas. Most of the money collected by the Sexual Exploitation Fund is destined for prevention activities.⁷⁰

69 Republic of Panama. [Law no. 16 of 2004](#). Article 25. (in Spanish).

70 CONAPREDE. (2019, February 19). [Informe de Gestión Enero a Diciembre 2018](#). 29.

ROBUST LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND EFFECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT

We know that legal reforms that clearly define and punish SECTT are essential for effective prevention and response to this crime. Legal reforms should go hand-in-hand with improved reporting mechanisms, increased cross-border law enforcement cooperation, and addressing chronic law enforcement challenges like lack of resources and training.

Most countries have national laws that prohibit a range of sexual offences against children; and SECTT-related crimes are usually covered within multiple laws. Offenders can be prosecuted for trafficking, exploitation of children through prostitution, and rape. However, these laws generally do not address SECTT-specific elements, for example by punishing operators who facilitate sexual exploitation of children via organised tours.⁷¹

Provisions that treat SECTT as a separately identifiable crime in national laws and regulations are to be formulated as part of comprehensive legal reform that should also⁷² include the establishment of legal obligations to report cases of SECTT.

When combined with the development or strengthening of operational reporting systems, this measure is expected to increase the number of reports of suspected cases of SECTT which remains persistently low everywhere.⁷³

Efforts to improve legislation on SECTT could be significantly enhanced through amendments and overhauls on extraterritorial laws.

Closing existing gaps and adopting extraterritorial legislation remain a major stride towards protecting children from SECTT, since it allows for prosecution of offences committed abroad under national laws in the offenders' home country.⁷⁴

71 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands. (2016). *Offenders on the Move*. 66.

72 *Ibid.*, 112.

73 ECPAT International. (2018). *International Summit in Child Protection in Travel and Tourism*. 25.

74 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands. (2016). *Offenders on the Move*. 112.

At the national level, some countries have legislated about the risks posed by voluntourism. In 2018, the Australian Government became the first nation to recognise 'orphanage trafficking' as a form of modern slavery⁷⁵ while in the UK, evidence was given into an independent review of the Modern Slavery Act urging the UK to do more to address its role in perpetuating the orphanage tourism 'industry'.⁷⁶

Enacting specific legislation on voluntourism is an essential step that national governments around the world should take.

Significant progress to enhance legal frameworks has been made in recent years at the regional and international level.

At the international level, a considerable step forward was the conversion of the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism into an international convention. Following concerted lobbying efforts, on 11th September 2019, the UNWTO adopted the [Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics](#) (herewithin Tourism Ethics Convention), moving from a voluntary set of guidelines to a binding international instrument that works to make the global tourism sector more ethical. Among measures included in this treaty, States that will ratify the Tourism Ethics Convention will be required to combat and penalise the exploitation of children, especially sexual exploitation (see art. 5.3).⁸⁰ At the time of writing this paper, the Tourism Ethics Convention has not yet come into force. The Republic of Indonesia has become the first signatory of the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics (2 October 2020).

AIPA EFFORTS TO SUPPORT REFORM OF SECTT-RELATED LEGISLATION

At the regional level, a good practice worth mentioning is the project implemented in 2018-2019 by the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA)⁷⁷ to strengthen and harmonise legal frameworks to protect children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism. As part of this initiative, a check-list⁷⁸ with key legal measures that member states can take to address SECTT was developed and endorsed during the 10th ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly Caucus meeting to guide reforms to protect children in Southeast Asia.⁷⁹ Research analysing the current state of implementation of SECTT-related laws in Southeast Asian countries is expected to be published by ECPAT International and AIPA in 2020. A similar analysis is also being developed for the Americas which will allow progress to be tracked, and compare advancements across regions as to how well legal frameworks are able to protect children from SECTT crimes.

75 Van Doore, K. E. & Nhep, R. (2019). [Orphanage trafficking, modern slavery and the Australian response](#). *Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity*, 7 (2): 115-133.

76 Setter, C. (2019, March). [Hope is on the horizon for tackling orphanage trafficking](#). *Thomson Reuters Foundation News*.

77 Protecting children in tourism/ECPAT International. (2019, March). [ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly works towards strengthening legal frameworks to protect children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism](#).

78 The legal checklist is available in English, French and Spanish at: Protecting children in tourism/ECPAT International (n.d.). [Legal Checklist – Key legal interventions to protect children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism](#).

79 Protecting children in tourism/ECPAT International. (2019, June 20). [ASEAN MPs endorse landmark legal framework to protect the region's children from travelling child sex offenders](#).

80 United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). (2020). [Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics](#), Madrid: UNWTO.

Given its relevance, it is imperative that national governments examine their provisions, sign and ratify the Tourism Ethics Convention and revise national laws to ensure that domestic legal frameworks address SECTT adequately. In this framework, advocacy by NGOs for the speedy ratification of this international agreement is crucial.⁸¹

While there are no alternative reports to the Tourism Ethics Convention, ECPAT International is advocating for the UNWTO to introduce a chapter on child protection in the reporting mechanisms to the General Assembly. Such a process would allow monitoring of governments and the travel and tourism industry progress in relation to child protection.

Legal reform alone is, however, not sufficient to prevent and counteract SECTT. Overcoming obstacles to law enforcement must be concurrent. Advances in transnational law enforcement collaboration are urgently needed. Channels for information exchange such as INTERPOL's Green Notices on convicted sex offenders⁸² should continue to be expanded. Shared databases with information about convicted perpetrators and alert systems that notify when a travelling child

sex offender is deported, granted bail or seeking to travel overseas should also be set up to prevent the perpetuation of sexual crimes against children across borders.⁸³ In countries where measures to restrict the travelling of sex offenders have been introduced (e.g. UK and Australia), their implementation must be consistently secured.⁸⁴

The policing of offences covered by extraterritorial legislation should continue to be enhanced, including through the deployment of more international liaison officers.⁸⁵ Efforts to address social tolerance for some SECTT amongst local law enforcement need to be prioritised along with ensuring more resources and training for police so that they can identify, investigate and respond to SECTT using child-sensitive approaches.⁸⁶

Indeed, a multi-country study conducted by ECPAT International to identify barriers that prevent child victims from accessing justice confirmed that local police are not sufficiently aware of trauma-led approaches nor trained to enforce laws.⁸⁷ It also found they rarely act proactively to find and rescue sexually exploited children, relying heavily on NGOs to conduct raid and rescue operations.⁸⁸

81 The Convention opened for signatures by states on 16 October 2019. As of March 2020, the Convention has not yet entered into force, as it has not yet been ratified by ten countries.

82 INTERPOL. (n.d.) [About notices](#).

83 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands. (2016). [Offenders on the Move](#). 78.

84 Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse. (2019). [Children Outside the United Kingdom Phase 2 Investigation Report Executive Summary](#). See also Blakkarly, J. (10 September 2018). [Australian paedophiles still trying to travel overseas despite passport ban](#). SBS News.

85 Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse. (2019). [Children Outside the United Kingdom Phase 2 Investigation Report Executive Summary](#).

86 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands. (2016). [Offenders on the Move](#). 112.

87 ECPAT International (2017). [Through the Eyes of the Child: Barriers to Access to Justice and Remedies for Child Victims of Sexual Exploitation](#). 21.

88 *Ibid.*

ACCESS TO CHILD AND GENDER SENSITIVE JUSTICE, PROTECTION, COMPREHENSIVE CARE, AND FULL RECOVERY

We know that children must be able to access the criminal justice system to secure remedies for the violation of their rights, including compensation and services they need to return to healthy lives. Providing comprehensive, holistic and prompt assistance that is tailored to meet the special needs of victims of SECTT helps to prevent their further victimisation while supporting their reintegration into regular life.

Children have a right to live free from sexual abuse and exploitation and to access justice when this right is violated.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, many cases of SECTT remain unreported due to ineffective mechanisms for reporting and response, distrust in the relevant authorities, stigmatisation and shame, or lack of awareness about the crime or remedies amongst victims. For those cases that are identified and reported, effective support systems are few and far between.⁹⁰

Many sexually exploited children require specialised psychological support, but generally there are not enough professional services.

Appropriately trained support staff and increased financial resources are therefore imperative to ensure effective services to assist the recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of child victims.⁹¹ There is an urgent need to expand long-term medical and psychosocial support services and tailored and age-appropriate programmes, including opportunities for youth to earn income and achieve a more independent living. Specialised services for male victims, younger children and LGBT youth should also be provided as they are largely absent.⁹²

89 United Nations General Assembly. (1989). [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), Article 34.

90 ECPAT International. (2017). [Expert Paper: Access to Justice for Child Victims of Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism](#). 2-5

91 ECPAT International. (2018). [International Summit in Child Protection in Travel and Tourism](#). 25.

92 ECPAT International. (2017). [Casting Light on the Care, Recovery and \(Re\)integration Needs of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children](#). 150-151.

Because SEC survivors require medical, psychological, social, legal and other services, multi-disciplinary teams are ideal to ensure that child victims receive the help they need. A promising example of a multi-disciplinary approach to SEC cases is the [Philippines' Protocol for Case Management of Child Victims of Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation](#).

Despite States beginning to incorporate procedures to make criminal justice systems more accessible to child victims, implementation is slow and uneven. Research shows that few sexually exploited children engage with the criminal justice system and fewer still participate in proceedings until their conclusion.⁹³ Few ever obtain compensation or monetary relief.⁹⁴

For effective implementation of access to justice for children, standard-setting is not enough. Work must ensure that children are actually benefiting from the child-friendly procedures that are on the books.

In the specific case of SECTT, the enforcement of compensation awards against foreign perpetrators who have assets overseas can be particularly difficult. Indeed, in several countries legislation restricts access to State compensation programmes, requiring applicants to have a connection to the country, through nationality, citizenship, residence and/or legal status.⁹⁵ Many States also restrict access to State compensation programmes to apply only for crimes that occurred in their territory. This does not allow victims of SECTT crimes committed overseas to obtain compensation.⁹⁶

Legal reform is therefore needed to overcome obstacles hindering access to compensation for children exploited in the context of travel and tourism.

93 *Ibid.* 17

94 *Ibid.* 6.

95 ECPAT International and Defence for Children/ECPAT Netherlands (2016). [Offenders on the Move](#). 68.

96 *Ibid.*, 21. Countries include Australia, Belgium, Germany, Hong Kong and Romania. To note that when a SECTT perpetrator's home country is a State with such restrictions, a victim located in the destination country cannot seek compensation from the State compensation programme where the perpetrator lives.

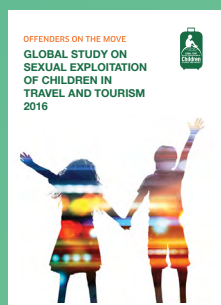
CONCLUSION

SECTT continues to occur in every region of the world. The [Global Study](#) published in 2016 galvanised concerted action against this crime and brought the issue to the attention of key decision-makers worldwide. The 2018 International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism continued to sustain momentum, with the concluding remarks setting a clear agenda. Global Progress has been made towards implementing some of the [Global Study](#)'s recommendations in the last five years, demonstrating commitment from partners across the globe. However, the challenge continues to maintain this momentum, ensure further implementation of all of the [Global Study](#)'s 46 recommendations, and scale up efforts to maintain impact.

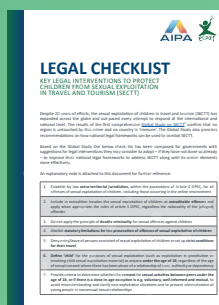
With the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 having far-reaching and sustained impacts on the travel and tourism sector, sustained attention must be placed on protecting children through the recovery.

If the ambitious objective of ending sexual exploitation of children is to be achieved, addressing SECTT is an essential context to pay attention to. Duty bearers from intergovernmental bodies, national governments, NGOs and the travel, tourism and transportation industry, ICT industry and companies whose staff members travel for business must cooperate.

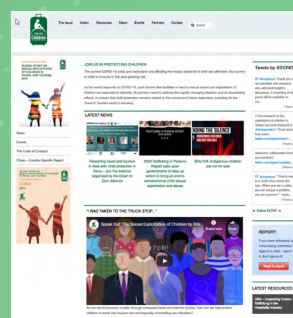
FURTHER RESOURCES



GLOBAL STUDY
RECOMMENDATIONS



LEGAL CHECKLIST



SECTT RESOURCE LIBRARY

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Suggested citation:
ECPAT International. (2020). Summary Paper on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

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328/1 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchathewi
Bangkok, 10400 THAILAND
Tel: +662 215 3388
Email: info@ecpat.org
Website: www.ecpat.org